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## MIRABEAU'S SECRET MISSION TO BERLIN<sup>1</sup>

ONE of the most sensational and damaging books ever published for the sins of a feeble and foolish government and the delectation of a scandal-loving public was Mirabeau's *Secret History of the Court of Berlin*. The unanimous outcry that greeted its appearance is not difficult to understand. Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of the illustrious Frederick, was at the time the guest of the French court, and here was a semi-official agent of that court informing the world that the Prince was narrow, vain, incapable and ridiculous; the peril of a war with the most military power of Europe had but recently been avoided, and here were thrown to the public quasi-diplomatic reports to the French government showing up the ruler of the Prussian monarchy as a "king of weaklings," as a feeble-minded, self-opinionated, boorish monarch, whom profligacy and conceit alone swayed. In these able, trenchant and witty pages, the surroundings of the Prussian court were unmercifully painted in lurid and scandalous colors, as they had originally been depicted in the dispatches sent from Berlin by Mirabeau for the information and amusement of the advisers of Louis XVI., perhaps for that of the King himself. The fate of the book was clearly written and easy to forecast. Versailles made hurried apologies to Potsdam, the author bowed before the storm and brazenly denied all paternity, and the hangman, on an order of the Parliament of Paris, consigned it in due form to the flames; all of which matters in no way prevented the reading of the book by all who could procure a copy.

Between the publication of the original edition by Malassis at Alençon in 1789 and of the latest one, now under review, various reprints have appeared, of which Mr. Welschinger, the present editor, purports to give a complete list; his attention may be directed to at least two which he has failed to notice: one by Blasdon (Paternoster Row, 1789), the other by P. Byrne (Dublin), of the same date.

The present edition does great credit to the indefatigable French historian, and it must be said at the earliest possible moment that Mr. Welschinger appears at his best when treating a subject that

<sup>1</sup> *La Mission Secrète de Mirabeau à Berlin, 1786-1787*; d'après les documents originaux des Archives des Affaires Étrangères, avec introduction et notes par Henri Welschinger. Paris: Plon, Nourrit et Cie. 1900.

does not relate to the beloved Napoleon. The editing has been well and thoroughly done ; for the first time the names left in blank in all former editions have been successfully filled in, and Mr. Welschinger has added to the whole an introductory essay on Mirabeau that is acceptable and readable. This said, one or two criticisms may not be out of place. The first of these relates to the title. Why name the book *La Mission Secrète de Mirabeau à Berlin* when in reality it is nothing more than an amplified edition of the *Histoire Secrète de la Cour de Berlin*? What is meant is this. Mr. Welschinger had clearly two courses before him,—either to edit Mirabeau's original book, in which case his title should have been the original title,—or to relate the history of Mirabeau's mission, giving as a part of that history the text of the dispatches, in which case the title he has chosen would have been justified. Between these two courses Mr. Welschinger has hesitated ; he has given us perhaps more than an edition, certainly less than a history. Working in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he has filled the blanks left in all former editions with the names of the people for whom they stood ; he has added some interesting letters from Talleyrand to Mirabeau, and from Esterno to Vergennes ; further, he has collated Trenck and annotated profusely. Had he but gone a step further and adequately dealt with two difficult and obscure matters of great interest and vital importance he might have claimed to have given us a full and authoritative relation of a curious and, in some ways, mysterious international episode ; omitting these, as he practically does, he lays himself open to the criticism of incompleteness that has just been made. Mr. Welschinger makes no attempt to follow out either the financial interests that played so large a part in Mirabeau's mission to Berlin, or his relations with the secret societies, the Freemasons, the *Illuminés*, the German Union.

Besides, one or two criticisms of detail may be made. The dispatch Number XII. that is given under date August 22, was certainly written earlier, probably between the 10th and the 15th of that month. The date assigned to dispatch Number XVII. is obviously wrong.

Among the prominent figures of the French Revolution, that of Mirabeau is perhaps the most typical of that violent social upheaval, but beneath the rugged and hideous distortion of his large features was concealed immense common sense and a constructive genius that placed him far in front of most of his contemporaries. He appeared by his face, by the strange violence and passion of his life, by his flaming disregard for decency, for reserve, for honor, by the overflowing of his superabundant vital energy, to personify the

return to the state of nature preached in the literature of his time,—but to nature, not under its Watteau or Trianon aspect, not as seen from the banks of blue Geneva, but to ferocious, volcanic, all-devouring nature,—that of the *Septembriseurs* and of the *Carmagnole*. But under all his extraordinary lack of moral restraint, of respect for the rights and opinions of others, under all his overweening vanity and overbearing insolence and invective, Mirabeau was possessed of a keen, shrewd insight that showed him facts as they were, and not as they appeared. To this he added the rare power of clear and effective expression, which, when he wrote or spoke with sincerity, at times rose to the greatest height of forcible eloquence. He wrote letters (as some of these from Berlin) that in delicacy of wit and irony equal the most vaunted of Madame de Sévigné's, but that in force, in knowledge, in freedom from artifice, immeasurably surpass them. There was nothing mincing about Mirabeau. As the flow of his pen, so that of his tongue, and as his written words brought financial ruin and caused sovereigns to tremble, so those he spoke perhaps changed the face of Europe, might perhaps, had he lived, have saved a monarchy.

Gabriel Honoré de Riquetti, son of the Marquis de Mirabeau, was born in 1749. His father, known from the name of a successful pamphlet as *L'Ami des Hommes*, came from a family of *petite noblesse* that had for some generations been unfavorably known for the eccentricities of its members. The marquis duly maintained the traditions of his fathers, or surpassed them even; for in vice and profligacy he was a source of wonder even to that remarkable generation. His wife was not much better than he, and the quarrels and discords of the couple were for some years the standing scandal of France.

The old marquis, among his other amiable peculiarities, was a domestic tyrant of the worst kind, for which, as well as for the vicious example their parents presented, his large family had to pay. Daughters were made to marry or to take the veil at the earliest possible age, and young Mirabeau was subjected to a system of harsh discipline totally unsuited to his precocious, expansive and intelligent nature.

The repression that had marked the period of his early education had not tended to improve his character. It was at length exchanged for the military service. Hardly had he entered on this career than he embarked on a series of grave disorders that resulted in imprisonment. After his release he served in an expedition to Corsica, and there, apparently, revealed military talents of a high order. Although only eighteen he was already beginning to im-

press those with whom he came into contact with a sense of his extraordinary powers. His uncle, who had no great love for him, says : "Unless the cleverest impostor in the world, he is of the finest stuff for the making of a pope, a captain by sea or land, a chancellor, or even an agriculturist."

Shortly after his return from Corsica, young Mirabeau married a wealthy *parti*, and settled down to a provincial life. But his idea of a quiet country life was all his own, he was soon in debt, and indulged himself in a violence of conduct, a viciousness of living and an overbearingness of manner that surpassed the worst eccentricities of his forefathers. His wife was not much better, and was unfaithful ; finally a disgraceful and famous fracas, in which Madame de Cabris and Monsieur de Mouan were concerned, resulted in the intervention of the Marquis de Mirabeau, who obtained a *lettre de cachet* in virtue of which his unruly son was relegated to a royal prison. The restraint he was placed under appears to have been light ; it allowed him sufficient liberty to make the acquaintance of the very commonplace Sophie, Marquise de Monnier ; this lady, whose husband was too old to attract her, fell in love with the hideously ugly, but magnetically attractive prisoner. In the end she eloped with him, the guilty pair escaping to Holland with what of the husband's money the fair one had been able to purloin. It was during this first sojourn abroad that Mirabeau developed the power, which he had not long since discovered, of writing for the press. Pamphlets and reviews of books of a democratic character soon made him a name as an eloquent and dangerous pamphleteer. He might have resided in peace in Holland, but with characteristic violence in one of his productions he indulged himself in the luxury of a virulent attack on his father and friends ; this resulted in his prompt arrest through the action of the French embassy at the Hague. In his absence from France he had been condemned to decapitation, but his fate was imprisonment at Vincennes, where he was destined to pass the next four years of his life.

It was while thus imprisoned, that Mirabeau composed his correspondence with Sophie, long considered his best work, the most effective passages of which should be read with a considerable grain of rhetorical salt. But this is not the place in which to dwell on this famous literary incident. The termination of his seclusion came as the result of the intercession of his father and of his wife, which he did not hesitate to abjectly entreat.

Then followed stormy times. The old marquis, the young count, and their wives, plunged into the vortex of conjugal and family disputes. Twisting and turning, lying and quibbling, they amazed the

public and even the lawyers with their venom, violence and turpitude ; but furthest of all carried the Titan voice of young Mirabeau, and the loud and brazen speechifying that made of him, with his family, the public nuisance of France, revealed him to the world as her most splendid and masterful orator.

It was then, while he stood at the bar of astonished and scandalized public opinion, the most notorious character of France, his vices written large on his distorted, bloated, pock-marked face, that Henriette van Haren, better known as Madame de Nehra, met him. She was only nineteen and knew little of the world. With all the spontaneous courage of her age, and after conquering the first natural movement of repulsion, she fell under the irresistible spell of the monster and determined to throw in her lot with his. It was with this young girl, of whom her contemporaries never spoke but with respect and regard, that Mirabeau spent the next few years of his tempestuous life,—they were to be those in which his excesses were least conspicuous, and his manners and thought least extravagant.

From the uproar and resentments he had aroused in his native land, the unrestrainable pamphleteer sought a refuge in England ; there he met many prominent men, assisted at sittings of the House of Commons, continued to publish, and voraciously to read whatever came to hand, especially the works of the economists. From what Mirabeau saw, heard, and read on this visit, may be traced many of the political, financial and administrative ideas that he turned to such good use afterwards as a member of the Assemblée Nationale. Expatriation, however, soon proved irksome ; Madame de Nehra crossed the channel and succeeded in obtaining an assurance from Breteuil that Mirabeau would be unmolested if he went back to Paris. He accordingly returned and became engaged in a new series of events that were to culminate in the mission to Berlin.

Among the pamphlets published by Mirabeau during his stay in England was one dealing with the stock-jobbing that was a prevalent mania of his time. Having returned to Paris, he continued to devote much of his attention to things financial, and in 1785 brought out *La Liberté de l'Escompte* ("on the non-restraint of discount"). This attracted the attention of the well-known Swiss bankers, Panchaud and Clavière ; they soon made the acquaintance of the pamphleteer. Panchaud was the biggest operator in stocks of Paris, and, like his successors of the present day, placed much reliance on secret and exclusive information and on the influencing of public opinion through the press ; he was surrounded by a large

circle of aristocratic hangers-on. Panchaud was also a freemason, and finance, free-masonry, and the opposition aristocracy all jostled very closely in his *salons*. It was there that Mirabeau met the Duc de Chartres, the most important personage in the masonic world, soon to be known as Philippe Égalité, Duc d'Orléans, his boon companion, the Duc de Lauzun, and, among others, the Abbé de Périgord, who achieved renown later as the Prince de Talleyrand. Here then was the greatest practical intellect of the day, a man with no other principle than that of his own advancement, placed at the centre of all financial and secret intrigue, in the midst of the shrewdest bankers, the most scheming adventurers and the most unprejudiced and ambitious politicians of France. What Mr. Welschinger has failed to bring out is that in this group was concentrated a power of money, of intellect and of secret intrigue, that made of it one of the principal forces of France.

The bankers' ring having secured this new and invaluable ally were not long in putting his powers to the test. It so happened that Calonne, controller of the King's finances, who since he had succeeded Necker two years before, had been engaged in a perpetual struggle to stave off bankruptcy, had arrived at the opinion that the secret of the low quotations of the state securities was the inflated price to which speculation had sent the shares of certain public companies. From this opinion, the controller drew a sage conclusion: if the quotations of the great speculative securities could be brought down to something like a representative price, the state securities would then attract more attention and rise in value. Starting from a totally different point of view, the bankers' ring were also anxious to depreciate the prices of certain gambling stocks, though it may be surmised that it was not in the expectation of seeing the state securities benefit from a big fall of prices. Be that as it may, Calonne and the ring, working together, intrusted their work to Mirabeau, and wonderfully well did he perform it. Clavière crammed him with the facts, and he put them into brilliant and masterly prose; with so much expedition did he labor, it is said, that one production of three hundred pages only occupied him eight days. Before the avalanche of abuse, ridicule and invective thus showered forth, the shares of the Bank of St. Charles fell from 800 to 320, the Paris Water-Works fell 44 %, the Caisse d'Escompte dropped in sympathy, despite the efforts of Beaumarchais and his friends, and a financial panic ensued in which every quoted security, including of course those of the state, fell heavily. Panchaud, Clavière and their friends netted large profits over the operation, but as to poor M. de Calonne, he gained nothing but a somewhat expensive lesson in

finance at heavy cost to his pocket and to that of the King. Angered at the unexpected and fatal result of the pamphleteer's eloquence, Calonne turned furiously against Mirabeau, and the latter, for his own protection, prepared a violent pamphlet against the minister, showing the latter's financial iniquities in the most merciless light. Armed with this unpublished tirade, as with a loaded pistol held at the controller's head, Mirabeau, with his powerful backing, was in a position to make terms. It was decided that he should leave Paris; his services being no longer urgently required, it was as well to utilize his talents in some new direction. This was what the bankers' group, or let us say Panchaud, Clavière, Talleyrand, Lauzun, arranged, with the consent of the pamphleteer. He was to go to Berlin where, through the relations of the Amis Réunis, a sect of Freemasons concerning which something more will appear presently, they had a secret means of acting. Mirabeau was to spy out the land,—politically, for the benefit of Calonne and the government,—financially, for that of his friends who had their eyes fixed on Frederick the Great's hoarded millions, and vaguely contemplated the establishment of a bank at Berlin. In addition to these objects, in which others were interested, Mirabeau may be conjectured to have had in mind that he might find, to his own profit, some opening suitable to his talents in the Prussian administration, that he might reveal himself in so brilliant a light as to force his way into the French diplomatic service, or that he might, at the worst, find new material on which to found a new series of his ever flowing publications.

Mirabeau left France on his German adventure at the end of the year 1785. Mr. Welschinger states that his only letter of recommendation was one from Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Esterno, French ambassador at Berlin. This statement must be taken for what it is worth, and cannot be accepted as correct from the narrow standpoint of strict proof. It is more than probable that Mirabeau was furnished with at least equally important recommendations from the French bankers to their German correspondents and from the Amis Réunis to the highest masonic and other secret circles at Berlin. Besides this, he was already in close relations with Major Mauvillon, with whom he was collaborating a history of Frederick the Great; this officer was a prominent "Illuminé," and it is noticeable that among others of the Frenchman's earliest acquaintances in Germany may be noted the names of such well-known "Illuminés" as Charles von Struensee, Nicolai, Luchet, and others; it was the latter who wrote the *Essai sur les Illuminés* that has been wrongly ascribed to Mirabeau. In addition to these already suffi-



cient openings, the French pamphleteer may be guessed to have had easy access to the circle in which Barth, Nicolai and Walther were conspicuous, or in other words, to the "German Union." Mr. Welschinger's hesitation at entering this very obscure field of history may be easily understood, for the authorities are contradictory, uncertain and misleading, but however difficult and unsatisfactory the task, it may be better to attempt to give some sort of indication of what must ever remain a very obscure chapter of history, than to take the course Mr. Welschinger does of ignoring what is incapable of strict proof. Unless some general view of the operations of the secret societies of France and Germany be obtained, no correct survey of the basis of Mirabeau's mission to Berlin can be had.

France and Germany, not to mention other parts of Europe, were at that time sown with masonic lodges, but the practice of the Masons of the two countries differed widely, as did that of the individual lodges. In France, new sects arose, and rites of all sorts, some of them wildly extravagant. Still, as a whole, the lodges remained essentially masonic in character. Without giving an extended account of the sects, and of the peculiarities of such lodges as those of the "Chevaliers Bienfaisants" of Lyons, or of the "Contrat Social" at Paris, without dwelling on the Martinistes, the Amis Réunis and the Philalethes, or on such excesses as were committed, for instance, at Ermenonville under the guidance of the quack St. Germain, the only fact that need be insisted on is that a great body of French Masons were grouped as Philalethes, or Amis Réunis, into the "Grand Orient" of France under the Mastership of the Duc de Chartres, afterwards Duc d'Orléans, and that the Panchaud-Talleyrand group were within the innermost circle. Among the foreign correspondents of this group, it is as nearly certain as possible that Ferdinand of Brunswick, Mauvillon and d'Alberg can be placed, the latter then, as in later days, a far more important personage than he appeared to the public. Leaving the Amis Réunis for the present, let us cross the frontier.

In Germany, the Masons had not gone so far in variation and complexity of ritual as in France, though the "strict observance," in which the Duke of Brunswick took a prominent part, deserves mention; on the other hand, several secret societies arose from among the masonic lodges, with well defined and advanced programmes. Leaving on one side the Rosicrucians, who need not enter into the subject and who may be dismissed as an offshoot of masonry, the most famous of these were the *Illuminati* or *Illuminés*, as they shall be called here. The founder of this society was a

professor of the University of Ingolstadt, Weisshaupt by name. The principal object of the association was, if the truth be told, to concentrate as much power as possible in the hands of its founder. But to those initiated into its highest grades and most solemn mysteries, the doctrines of the equality of men, of the falsity of religion, and of the foundation of the universal republic were gradually unfolded. Illuminism spread with tremendous rapidity, chiefly in masonic circles, and received accessions from even the highest ranks ; for some years it flourished unsuspected. Finally the Elector of Bavaria first suspected, then discovered it, and it was ostensibly suppressed in 1783. But the only result of the steps taken by the Elector was to break up the centre of the society, to put an end to the leadership of Weisshaupt ; the Illuminés continued to flourish in various parts of Germany under a variety of forms for some years, and included among their members representatives of all classes, even of royalty, though the latter, it may be guessed, never reached the highest grades. From among the Illuminés arose the less important but very curious "German Union." The programme and the doctrines of the latter resembled closely those of the former, but it had a business side. It included all the principal publishers of Germany, and their aim was to convert it into a secret trade-guild giving them a monopoly of public opinion and of publishing profits. It was to be a secret continuation under a somewhat more convenient style of the ancient *Gelehrtenbuchhandlung*. Under cover of the reading-rooms and literary clubs which the German Union instituted, it was sought to control the thinking public by decrees issued from Leipzig. The *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* and the *Berlinische Monatschrift* were the organs of the German Union ; Mirabeau assiduously studied both these publications. The importance of this curious society was short-lived and never very great ; the scandal of Dr. Barth finished it.

Among the Masons and their offshoots on both sides of the frontier, Mesmer, Cagliostro, Lavater, St. Germain and all the quacks and spiritualists prospered. But it is a mistake to identify any of these men, or the movements they exploited, with any or all of the societies named. Some lodges and many Masons, Illuminés and others, doubtless fell under their influence, while they were always ready to enroll and proclaim themselves members of these societies. But other lodges, other Masons and Illuminés despised and ridiculed them. Men with hard heads like Mirabeau, Weisshaupt, Talleyrand and Nicolai, were not to be taken in by jugglery and charlatanism, even if King Frederick William and Fräulein von Voss were.

Having thus briefly called attention to a state of affairs that placed Mirabeau in a position in many ways advantageous and exceptional, we must return to an account of his journey.

Immediately on his arrival at Berlin, he characteristically wrote to the old King asking for an audience. Frederick, with his usual expedition, immediately answered the French traveller, granting his request. A first interview was followed by several others, and established Mirabeau as a person of importance at Berlin. In the meanwhile he saw much of Mauvillon and moved in literary and diplomatic circles. He appears to have particularly cultivated the acquaintance of Von Dohm of the Prussian Foreign Ministry, of Prince Henry, the King's brother, and of Ewart, the very clever first secretary of the British legation, who was to prove in the near future at least as clever a diplomat as Mirabeau himself. Esterno, the French ambassador, a man of little judgment and no weight, was evidently not delighted at the appearance of this irregular representative of the French ministry, and in his dispatches to Vergennes showed considerable animus against the new-comer.

As usual, the indefatigable French pamphleteer was not long idle ; absorbing the new facts about him with the utmost facility, he gave them out again adorned with the brilliancy of form which he knew how to impart. At this period he came within the influence of the great German publisher Nicolai, a prominent *Illuminé* and member of the German Union, and did much literary work for him, including, it is probable, the writing of some violent attacks on the Prussian political system and administration. His principal acknowledged production was a defence of the famous Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, a friend of Nicolai's.

But political affairs were the ostensible object of Mirabeau's journey, and he accordingly prepared for M. de Calonne a *Memorandum* on the European situation. The statements contained in this document we need not follow, but, to place the reader at the right point of view for judging of what is to ensue, the position of affairs in Europe, as they might appear in Berlin, must now be briefly summed up.

By far the most important and interesting figure on the stage of politics was that of the aged King of Prussia. The terrible Seven Years' War had left the great Frederick in possession of desolated Silesia, and had established his reputation as the greatest general since Julius Caesar. The period of war over, he had ruled his subjects stringently, but with economy, had drilled his splendid army to his heart's content, and had cultivated the arts of peace. The greatest personal prestige in Europe was his, the most perfectly organized army and the largest reserve of gold. As against this, Prussia was

actuated by no very well-defined aggressive ambition ; the one point on which her foreign policy was likely to lead her into difficulties shall be indicated presently.

Russia, under Catherine II., was principally occupied in repressing Poland and extending her borders at the expense of Turkey. The affairs of Sweden and Courland need not be noticed here.

Austria, under Joseph II., was on amicable terms with Russia, and also with France through the Emperor's sister, Marie Antoinette. Up to the year 1786, his chief preoccupation had been internal reforms of a liberal character ; from that date, his policy became one of expansion towards the south. Yet Prussia viewed with suspicion the son of Maria Theresa, and could never feel entirely certain that the conquest of Silesia was forgotten and that the Emperor would not some day attempt its recovery or perhaps seek compensation in some other direction.

England was fast recovering from the effects of the disastrous war which, arising out of the foolish policy pursued towards her American colonies, had resulted in the humiliating treaty of Paris. Wiser counsels were now in the ascendant, the younger Pitt had commenced his administration of affairs, and the public funds were rising by leaps and bounds. Commerce and finance now engrossed the attention of England's statesmen, while on the Continent such shrewd men as Harris, Dalrymple and Ewart were rapidly increasing her lately impaired influence.

France was on the verge of a great revolution ; for a century past her monarchs and ministers had, with but rare exceptions, been distinguished for nothing but profligacy, dishonesty and incompetence. Yet the wealth of the country had increased, principally through the exertions of the middle class, professional and mercantile, that had vastly increased in numbers and importance. Finance and speculation had been introduced, and notwithstanding one or two panics, the extent of the banking and company operations testified, not only to the wealth, but to the enterprise of the country. Alongside of this class, in which intelligence, whether honest or otherwise, was the one means of success, arose a school of writers of whom Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau may be recalled ; these literary giants and their followers, together with the French travellers and soldiers who had visited America at the time of the War of Independence, had set the fashion of thinking towards the natural rights of man, and against maladministration and despotism. Last of all, the condition of the masses was deplorable, and worse, in that it was largely remediable. The farming of the revenue, the restrictions on inland circulation, the improvidence, incapacity and dishonesty of

those in high places were plagues that occasionally brought terrible results. While in one part of France a surplus of wheat brought its owners no return, in a neighboring province the people would be eating grass, and dying of starvation. The finances of a country, that a very few years of good administration should have made wealthy, had been reduced by the long infliction of divine right, incapacity, and aristocratic robbery, to a state of chaos and bankruptcy; under an unintelligent and obstinate king and senseless and venal ministers, France was fast sinking into the gulf of revolution.

The chief preoccupation of the western powers was the question of Holland. The curious constitution of that country, an incompatible mixture of monarchism and republicanism, was always giving rise to trouble between stadholders of the House of Orange and the democratic party. One of these periodical difficulties was now engrossing the attention of European diplomacy. Wilhelmina, niece of Frederick, sister of the Prince of Prussia, afterwards Frederick William II., was the wife of the stadholder, so that the House of Orange had a family claim to the support of the royal house of Prussia as well as to that of Great Britain. The English diplomats were striving hard to effect a *rapprochement* between the two powers on this question, thereby hoping to strengthen their country's European position by bringing her into line once more with the great military power of Frederick. France, in a spirit of half-hearted opposition to England, had been supporting the democratic party in Holland; the questions a French statesman might well ask himself were these: How would the probably early death of Frederick affect the situation? Would Austria be persuaded to bring pressure to bear on Prussia, either in the direction of Silesia, or by attempting the succession of the childless Elector of Bavaria? Could an understanding on the question of Holland be effected? How could a *rapprochement* or alliance between England and Prussia be prevented? In his memorial to Calonne, which is dated June 2, 1786, Mirabeau predicts the death of Frederick within two months (a very shrewd guess as will be seen). After brilliantly summing up the international position, not without a passing stab at Esterno, he concludes that the best line of policy for France is to come to terms with Prussia and England on the basis of a reciprocal guarantee of actual possessions. For bait to England, he places foremost a commercial treaty which he well knew would coincide with the views of Pitt, of his friends in Paris, and of the French ministers.

France had one or two good cards to play and the diplomatic *volte-face* recommended by Mirabeau was not only feasible, but

offered many advantages. The anxiety of the English diplomats at that time may well be exemplified by a quotation from a dispatch from Sir James Harris, then minister at the Hague and afterwards better known as Lord Malmesbury, to Lord Carmarthen; it is dated February 26, 1786. Alluding to Mirabeau, he writes: ". . . I must needs confess . . . that I strongly admit in my own mind the belief of a secret understanding and fellow feeling between Prussia and France, and that they say to each other, as Molière's doctors,—*Passez moi la rhubarbe, et je vous passerai le séné.*—Let me alone in Holland, says France, and you, Prussia, shall have nothing to fear in Bavaria."

For a few days of June Mirabeau returned to Paris. The views he had so ably presented had been heartily indorsed by the clique; Calonne, easily influenced, and still dreading the terrible unpublished pamphlet that was to expose his financial iniquities to the public, was persuaded to agree to Mirabeau's return to Berlin as secret agent of the government. It was arranged that his dispatches should be sent through the intermediary of Talleyrand, whose task it would be to decipher them and to present them to the minister; it was also further arranged that Calonne should supply the necessary funds.

It was while on this brief visit to Paris that Mirabeau is asserted (by Barruel, Robison and other authorities of the same class) to have introduced the secret organization and doctrines of the Illuminés into France. It is said that he had been initiated by Mauvillon and that his journey to Paris had for its principal object the initiation of Talleyrand, Orléans, Lauzun, and other prominent members of the Grand Orient. Such a statement, derived by Barruel from an unknown source, is not made to command confidence, at the same time it would be a mistake to reject a statement, otherwise probable, merely because it owes its origin to that not very scientific historian. Whether Mirabeau was an Illuminé or not can probably never be proved now, but that he was is at least highly probable (notwithstanding his own disclaimers); that he initiated his friends on the occasion of his visit to Paris in June, 1786, is just as incapable of proof, but there is nothing inherently improbable about it, though it is quite certain that such an occurrence cannot be assigned to September, 1786, as has been done by some writers, for Mirabeau spent most of that month in Dresden.

The sixty-six dispatches sent to Talleyrand from Berlin are full of interest from the first line to the last; at times they rise to the highest pitch of literary merit; they are never dull. Mirabeau surveys everything that the court of Prussia can show with the keen

and cynical eye of a philosopher and political free-lance. His observations on matters commercial, financial, political and social, are vivid and full of food for reflection, but he does not hesitate to vent his spite, when the occasion serves, and to relate scandalous stories about the highest personages, calculated to tickle the highly seasoned palates of Talleyrand and his other good friends, and, when he believes that by so doing he can further his own interests, to boldly invent facts. It is not possible within the space of this article to go through these dispatches at length; only a few points of interest will be touched on, and the reader who would have the whole of the *chronique scandaleuse* of Berlin, the story of Fräulein von Voss and all the rest, must be referred to Mr. Welschinger's edition.

When Mirabeau reached Berlin in July, the public attention was centred on the last hours of the fast-failing Frederick. Copious details of the state of the King were sent off to Talleyrand by every courier; on August 2 it is related that: "Frese (the King's doctor at Potsdam) is still very much in disgrace for having dared utter the word,—dropsy,—in answer to a summons to state, as a man of honor, the name and character of the disease. The King suffers from fits of shivering and is constantly wrapped in rugs and covered with quilts. He has not been to bed for six weeks. . . . What seems certain is that 'we' do not wish to die. . . . at all events the mind is not affected, and 'we' are even working particularly hard.'

How Mirabeau heard of the death of the King, is related in the following lively manner, under date August 17:

"The event is accomplished, Frederick William reigns, and one of the grandest characters ever formed by nature is dissolved. My firm resolve of friendly duty was that you should have the earliest news of this event, and my measures had been taken with the greatest care. At eight on the morning of Wednesday, I already knew that 'we' were at the last extremity; that the day before 'we' had only given the pass-word at twelve instead of at eleven as usual; that it was noon before 'we' had spoken to the secretaries who had been in attendance since five; that notwithstanding this, the dispatches had been clear and precise; that 'we' had again eaten immoderately, notably a lobster. Besides all this, I was aware that the lack of cleanliness prevailing about the patient's room and about him . . . had set up a sort of putrid fever; that the somnolence of that day, Wednesday, was nearly lethargic; that everything announced a hydropic apoplexy, a dissolution of the brain, and, in fine, that a few hours must in all probability witness the closing scene. At one o'clock I was on horseback on the road to Potsdam, drawn by some vague presentiment, when a groom came galloping by for Doctor Zelle, who was ordered not to lose a minute and who started at once. I soon learnt that the groom had killed his horse. . . . I hastened to the French minister's; he was out; he was dining at Charlottenburg, no means of meeting him at Berlin. I got myself dressed; I

start for Schoenhausen and arrive at the Queen's at the same time as our representative ; he had no details and had no idea the King was in so serious a condition ; not one of the ministers would believe it. Lord Dalrymple, with whom I am on too good terms to dissemble, assured me I was mistaken. I answered, 'Possibly ;' but I whispered to our minister that my news was from the bedside, and that he would be well advised to believe that a speculator might possibly be as well informed as a diplomat." . . .

Mirabeau then goes on to describe the steps he took for insuring the safe dispatch of the great news to France ; special couriers outside the walls, pigeons, and so forth ; his precautions were infinite, for it was certain that the Prussian government would, at the first moment, put an embargo on all news.

"M. de Nolde was just leaving at half-past six in the morning, when General Goertz, aide-de-camp to the late King, came up at a tearing gallop, shouting :—By order of the King, close the gates, and so M. de Nolde had to turn back. Within five minutes I was mounted, (my horses had remained saddled all night), and, to accomplish my fullest duty, galloped off to the French minister's ; he was asleep ; I at once wrote that I had safe means of communication in case he had any occasion for such a convenience ; he answered, (and I have kept his note as a curious memento in case, though I can hardly believe it, M. de Vergennes should receive no dispatch) ;—'Le Comte d'Esterno has the honor of thanking Monsieur le Comte de Mirabeau ; he will not avail himself of his obliging offer.' "

The accession of the Prince of Prussia to the throne left vacant by the death of his illustrious uncle gave rise to all the ambitions and uncertainties usual in such cases. A man of Mirabeau's temperament was not likely to be the last to bring himself to the notice of a new monarch from whom anything might be expected, he therefore composed a memorial, afterwards published under the title of *Lettre remise à Frédéric Guillaume II.*, which Mr. Welschinger would have been well advised had he added to his appendix.

Frederick William was an unknown quantity ; he was thought to be adverse to the routine of business and known to be addicted to pleasure. Would the new duties of his elevated station effect a change in him ? Prussia stood in need of reform ; Frederick had been economical and had accumulated a large reserve of gold, but his financial system had none the less been badly organized and disorderly ; it required radical alterations. Would the new king undertake them ? Could he be persuaded to intrust them to a really capable financier ? Would he be willing to earn an income by investing the gold of his predecessors in some remunerative manner to be indicated by such skilled financiers as Panchaud, Struensee, Mirabeau ?



Frederick William might have done worse, as the sequel proved, than take the French adventurer as his financial adviser, and this was doubtless the opinion of Mirabeau himself. His letter to Frederick William is a high pitched but fine piece of rhetorical flattery and advice ; it merits perusal as it is most characteristic of the writer. There is some internal evidence that tends to show that this letter was addressed by one *Illuminé* to another.

In the early days of the new reign it was expected that great authority would be exercised by Prince Henry, brother of the late king, but Frederick William soon showed that, even if he was not disposed to do the hard work of his station, he had no intention of sharing any of its authority. Neither with the King, nor with Prince Henry, to both of whom he made all possible advances, did Mirabeau succeed in improving his position ; he was too French and too heroic a remedy for the ills of Prussia.

Before the coolness of the King, and because of his equivocal unofficial position, Mirabeau soon found himself at a standstill ; a fortnight after the accession he writes :

“It is becoming very difficult to observe the King. He is introducing the strictest ceremonial of German etiquette. It is said that he will not receive foreigners, at all events for a while. I shall of course be informed of what is going on by the spying of valets, courtiers and secretaries, and also by the intemperate outbursts of Prince Henry ; but there are only two ways of really exercising influence here, that is in giving, or rather in suggesting, ideas to the master or to his ministers. To the master? How can I, as we do not meet? To the ministers? It is neither easy nor proper for me to broach business with them since I am not accredited, and those discussions that do arise by chance are short, vague, and interrupted. If my services are considered useful, I should be sent where I can be accredited, otherwise I shall cost more here than I am worth.”

The question of Holland, that was eventually to lead to Prussian intervention, was fast coming to a head. Ewart, a very young diplomat, whose early death closed an interesting and promising career, was temporarily in charge of the British embassy at Berlin, and was successfully negotiating an understanding with the Prussian ministers. Mirabeau, with no official position, unsupported and unheeded by the ministers at Versailles, could do little to place France in a better position, and was condemned to look on while the friendship of England and Prussia became every day closer. If powerless and playing a losing game, he at all events kept his wits about him. The representative of England was beginning to assume a high tone about the rights of the Stadholder of Holland : “Yesterday, Mr. Ewart,” writes Mirabeau, “secretary of the English legation, in the presence of fifteen people, M. de Hertzberg backing

him up the while by word and by gesture, addressed these very words to me,—The Stadholder is constitutionally the executive power of Holland, or, to put it more clearly, his position in Holland is precisely similar to that of the King in England. I answered with frigid irony,—Let us therefore hope the Hollanders will not cut his head off. The laugh was not with Mr. Ewart ! ”

To conclude with the affairs of Holland, it may be noted that not the least interesting of Mirabeau's dispatches from Berlin are those that refer to the efforts made by him to recover the ground lost by French diplomacy in this business. His arguments are plausible and show a fine grasp of political principles, but they leave an overwhelming impression of the falsity of the writer. It must be pronounced more than probable that both in the case of the negotiations with the Duke of Brunswick and with Baron de Reede, Mirabeau was actively engaged inventing diplomatic positions with the sole object of thereby securing his employment in the French diplomatic service.

On a small point of etiquette, a stupid slight had been put on the French ambassador ; Mirabeau relates, in a pungent letter, how Frederick William tried to efface the bad impression that had been created.

“ I shall commence this dispatch with some perfectly authentic information that appears to me decisive as to the character of the new reign. I will recall what I wrote on the 29th of August.—‘ The King seems to have determined to give up all his old habits ; it is a noble effort ! He retires before ten, he rises at four. . . . If only he perseveres he will afford a unique example of the habits of thirty years conquered. If he succeeds, he will reveal a force of character that will prove too much for all of us.’ Well ! like all the rest I was taken in by appearances. The truth is that at half-past nine, while we thought him asleep, he was celebrating Sardanapalian orgies in the innermost apartments of the palace. . . . What sort of mortal then is the master ? I still think it would be hasty to come to a conclusion to-day, but one is tempted to answer,—the king of weaklings. No wit, no strength, no logic, no application, the taste of the hog of Epicurus, and of the heroic, nothing but pride, unless I mistake for that quality a narrow, shopkeeping vanity. . . . However I am not engaged on a second volume of *Madame de Sévigné*. I am not speaking evil of Frederick William because I have nothing to do with him, as she used to praise Louis XIV. because he had just made her dance a minuet. Yesterday at the Queen's circle he three times addressed me, and this for the first time in public. ‘ You have been to Magdeburg and Brunswick ? ’ ‘ Yes, Sire. ’ ‘ What did you think of the manoeuvres ? ’ ‘ I admired greatly. ’ ‘ I am asking you for the truth and not for a compliment. ’ ‘ Sire, the truth is to me that only the presence of Your Majesty could have enhanced such a superb sight. ’ ‘ And how is the Duke ? ’ ‘ Perfectly well, Sire. ’ ‘ Will he soon be here ? ’ ‘ Your Majesty alone can know. ’ . . . He smiled . . . That is a sample ! You may well imagine that what is said before the whole court is a matter

of total indifference to me ; but with the spectators it is far otherwise, and I note this as having been intended as some sort of reparation to France ! ”

In his dispatch of December 2, 1786, occurs a curious passage, too long to quote, in which Mirabeau with many expressions of dislike and horror describes proceedings and rites of initiation which he ascribes to the Illuminés. Among many authentic descriptions of Rosicrucian, Masonic and Illuminé ceremonies none can be found to tally with the one here given, and it bears every appearance of being fictitious and of having been written for other eyes than those of Talleyrand.

As early as the end of October the expatriated pamphleteer was tiring of his not very satisfactory, and unfruitful mission. Politically there was nothing to be done, the millions of Frederick seemed no nearer the safes of Panchaud's bank, or the linings of Mirabeau's pockets. He writes : “ I am full of disgust and lassitude ; I appeal to your honor and friendship to tell me what I am, what I am doing, where I am being carried, or to arrange matters so that I may again enjoy freedom. The editors will deal with me more kindly than our rulers do, and I shall not be called on to treat them so tenderly. I will perform anything at the bidding of friendship, but not at that of those in authority, and I should be a great fool to exert myself more in their behalf than they do themselves.”

Whenever the irascible exile gave forth threats, Talleyrand, prompted by Calonne as we may guess, poured oil on the troubled waters, as witness the following extract from a letter of the Abbé to Mirabeau in which, if flattery occupies a large place, the proportion of truth must remain highly problematical : “ We are more than pleased with your correspondence, as I hear repeated every day. The King reads it with the utmost interest. M. de Calonne thanks you for your promptness, for the care with which your dispatches are drawn ; I have laid emphasis on the excellence of your statistical information. The value of your work has been appreciated.”

In the month of January, 1787, Mirabeau had come to the final conclusion that he had nothing to hope from either Frederick William or Calonne. He could do nothing more at Berlin. On the 13th of that month he wrote to Talleyrand a letter which shall be the last noticed here and in which occur the following passages :

“ Never did kingdom show more symptoms of rapid decline than this. It is being undermined from all sides at once. Sources of revenue cut off ; expenses increased ; principles out of fashion ; public opinion wasted ; the army weakened ; the few useful men discouraged ;

those for whom others have been made discontented, now discontented themselves ; all meritorious foreigners sent packing ; for the sake of appearing to rule alone only rascallions promoted. . . . I might remain here ten years without giving you any new facts, though doubtless many details. . . . What is to be my function in the future? Nothing useful ; but usefulness, and that great, immediate, direct, is the only thing that could make me longer tolerate this ambiguous position. Once more I repeat, what I deserve, what I can do, what I am worth, must now be decided by the King and his ministers. If I neither deserve, nor am capable of accomplishing anything, I am costing the King too much. If I do deserve and if I am capable of anything. . . I owe it to myself to ask for and to obtain some position, or to go back to my old trade of citizen of the world that will be less fatiguing to body and mind and less unfruitful of fame."

A week later Mirabeau had written the last of his dispatches from Berlin and was on his way to Paris. He had accomplished nothing, but had learned much, and passed 'a diplomatic apprenticeship that was soon to stand him in good stead. His keen political instinct had detected in the convoking of the Notables of France, then just decided on (perhaps at his advice), the first note of the revolution ; the time was fast approaching when his eloquence was to sway the fortunes of King and of people from the tribune of the *Assemblée Nationale*.

It is uncertain what prompted Mirabeau to publish his correspondence from Berlin two years later. Mr. Welschinger thinks that it was owing to pressure for money, and that would appear the best opinion. But it may be taken as certain that Mirabeau, then on the point of appealing to the people to support him against the Crown, had quite realized the impression these documents would produce of the incapacity of the French ministers and of their diplomatic agents, and also of his own superior ability. Whatever his motives, few who have read the dispatches will defend the act.

No one before Mr. Welschinger had attempted the task he has so successfully accomplished. As an editor, he has left little for a successor to do ; it has perhaps been shown that, from the point of view of the historian, there is yet much to be done before the tangle of the hidden threads of the operations, diplomatic, financial, and social, of Mirabeau at Berlin is unravelled.

R. M. JOHNSTON.